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STATE FOR NEA/PPD; NEA/ARP; ECA

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SUBJECT: UAE ACCESS STUDENTS: "I THOUGHT THAT AMERICANS ARE AFRAID OF ARABS"

REF: ABU DHABI 000097

1.(U) SUMMARY AND ACTION REQUEST: AMBASSADOR SISON HANDED CERTIFICATES OF GRADUATION TO 100 UAE ELEVENTH-GRADE STUDENTS AT THE MICROSCHOLARSHIP GRADUATION CEREMONY ON MAY 8, 2005. AT THE CEREMONY, ELS LANGUAGE CENTERS AWARDED \$700 SCHOLARSHIPS FOR 60-HOUR TOEFL PREPARATION CLASSES TO EIGHT STUDENTS FROM TWO SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE EMIRATE OF AJMAN AND TWO IN THE EMIRATE OF ABU DHABI. THE STUDENTS WERE CONFIDENT WITH THEIR NEW ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS, RELAXED WITH THE AMERICAN TEACHERS AND EMBASSY STAFF, AND PROUD OF THE ATTENTION FROM THE PRESS AND MINISTRY OFFICIALS. ELS LANGUAGE CENTERS WAS THE PERFECT PARTNER OF THE EMBASSY IN THIS INNOVATIVE AND SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM.

2. ACTION REQUEST: POST STRONGLY RECOMMENDS EXPANSION OF THE PROGRAM TO 500 STUDENTS AND WOULD LIKE TO ADD \$700 TOEFL-PREPARATION SCHOLARSHIPS FOR 2 OUTSTANDING STUDENTS FROM EACH CLASS.

Non-Elite Emirati Students

3. Equal numbers of 11th grade boys and girls were selected to participate in the Microscholarship ACCESS program. The Ministry of Education helped Post select secondary schools in needy areas of the country that could be reached by American teachers working for ELS Language Centers, the implementing partner chosen for the project. After agreement was reached with school administrators and educational zone officials, Post provided letters for students to bring home to their families to explain USG involvement in the program. The students selected had beginner-level English skills and little opportunity to improve their skills outside of their local government schools.

Innovative Teaching Methods

4. TRADITIONAL ENGLISH TEACHING IN THE GULF WAS PREVIOUSLY VOID OF CULTURAL CONTENT. IN THIS COURSE, HOWEVER, THE CULTURAL CONTENT WAS THE CORE OF THE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE. ELS USED POST-PROVIDED "ALL ABOUT THE USA," SUPPLEMENTED BY LONGMAN'S "COMMUNICATION SKILLS" AND EXPRESSWAY'S "READY TO READ/READY TO WRITE". COURSE MODULES INCLUDED INFORMATION ON US SOCIETY AND CULTURE, GEOGRAPHY, SYMBOLS, CAREERS, BIOGRAPHIES OF PEOPLE, AND US HOLIDAYS AND TRADITIONAL FOOD. FOR EACH MODULE, THE STUDENTS TALKED ABOUT THE SUBJECT, READ, COMPARED, WROTE AND PRESENTED. THE COURSE ENCOURAGED CRITICAL THINKING RATHER THAN COPYING OR MEMORIZING. THE COURSE INCLUDED A GUEST SPEAKER EVERY MONTH, A FIELD TRIP, AND A DISCUSSION GROUP ON A SPECIFIC ISSUE. ALL ACTIVITIES INCLUDED ENGAGING WITH AMERICANS. THE COURSE RAN FOR 2 HOURS AFTER SCHOOL 4-5 DAYS A WEEK.

Graduation at the Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation

5. Students from all four participating schools came together for the first time on May 8 for the graduation, traveling up to three hours to come to the capital. The ceremony was attended by parents as well as the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education, the Directors of the Abu Dhabi and Ajman Educational Zones, ELS Middle East Director, ELS teachers, school principals and members of the media. During the ceremony, ELS played a power point presentation showing the various field trips and activities that students participated in as part of the program. (Note: These included visits to the US Embassy and Consulate, the American Community School, and US Education College Expos; participation in a focus group on Hi Magazine with Alex Feldman; visits to schools by junior officers; and career sessions conducted by embassy educational advisor. End note.) After certificate presentations, a representative from each of the classes gave a speech in English. The Ambassador congratulated the students on their commitment and accomplishments and reminded them that they were always welcome in the United States and had friends in the Embassy and Consulate. The Undersecretary urged them to continue their studies. PA staff took group photos of participants which were sent to each of the students, and the day's program finished with lunch, at which students had a further opportunity to speak with PA officers.

Evaluation of Program: Language Skills and Trust-Building

16. Language skills were tested at the beginning and at the conclusion of the course. The majority of girls started at level 102 or 103 (beginner level on the ELS scale of 101 - 109) and reached level 105 and 106 (upper intermediate). The boys were true beginners at level 100, but most of them tested 104 and 105 by the end. The emphasis on speaking and active learning and many hours of interaction with native speakers resulted in this enormous jump in tested level.

17. The change in comfort level and trust by the parents of the participating students was palpable. At the beginning of the course, the school principals and the parents required that 3 or 4 chaperons would accompany the students on any field trip and only after letters were sent home to the families. By the end, parents allowed students to be accompanied by only their English teacher. The level of trust in ELS, the US Embassy, and the program in general increased tremendously.

18. One of the most exciting activities for the students was a visit to the American Community School in Abu Dhabi where the UAE boys played a soccer game with the American boys and the girls joined in an art activity with their American hosts. At the end of the visit the UAE students invited the American students to visit their schools to return their hospitality and share with them "the other side of the coin" as one student put it. By graduation, students eagerly had their photos taken and easily chatted with the American officers.

Quotes by students

19. "I thought that Americans are afraid of Arabs."

"The US history is not as short as we thought. There are similarities between our history and the American history. Both societies had tribes."

"What happened in the 60's and 70's in the US is what is happening in our country now in terms of development, women going to school, boys getting education instead of going to work with their fathers."

"There was an Emirati citizen from Ras Al Khaimah with Christopher Columbus when he traveled for the first time to discover America."

"I need an extra book for my sister. She wants to learn about America."

"Evenings at home will be so boring without the class to attend."

News reaches the Arab public

10. THE THREE MAJOR ARABIC DAILIES, "AL-BAYAN" (CIRCULATION 35,000), "AL-ITTHAD" (CIRCULATION 45,000), AND "AL-KHALEEJ" (CIRCULATION 65,000) HAD GOOD COVERAGE OF THE EVENT ON MAY 9, WITH PHOTOS OF THE AMBASSADOR AND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION OFFICIALS WITH THE GIRLS AND BOYS IN TWO OF THESE NEWSPAPERS. STORIES USED A POST-PREPARED FACT SHEET.

Assessment of Partner Organization

11. ELS Language Centers, the local implementer, did an outstanding job. They worked closely with Post from the beginning to sell the program to skeptical officials at the educational zones and the Ministry. They understood that the purpose of the program was to change attitudes as much as to improve language skills. They sent warm and friendly teachers into the classrooms. A curriculum supervisor designed a unified structure for the four classes, which led to the dramatic improvement in the students' language skills and their confidence in using the language. ELS communicated on a daily basis with the administrators of the participating schools and worked closely with Post to develop extracurricular activities.

12. ELS awarded two scholarships to each school for outstanding students who had the highest attendance rate and commitment, highest participation, and highest test scores. The scholarship will pay for 60 hours of TOEFL preparation course at ELS. Each scholarship is for UAE Dirhams 2500 (US \$700).

Future of the Microscholarship ACCESS Program

13. The Embassy and program implementers are unanimous that they have never seen a program which gives so much return for a very limited sum of money. For \$1,000 per student, a relationship of

trust was built between the students, their families, the schools, the educational zones and the Ministry with the American teachers, ELS, and the US Embassy. Young, impressionable Emirati nationals who had little or no previous personal connection to Americans and the United States are now positively inclined and have a positive picture to substitute for repetitive negative images in the media.

14. Because of the success the program, the Ministry of Education and Educational Zones at the different Emirates have already inquired about next year. Subject to availability of funds from ECA, Post would be able to give scholarships to 500 students for the new school year. We would offer the program at five locations (Ras Al Khaimah, Sharjah, Ajman, Al-Ain, and Shahama) with 100 grade 10 and 11 students at each location, 50 boys and 50 girls. They would use the same books and materials as this year. In addition, Post recommends funding two students from each class of 25 to get a TOEFL Scholarship at the conclusion of the course, in addition to the two scholarships which ELS has committed to giving as cost sharing. At \$700 for 20 scholarships, this would add \$14,000 to the grant.

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